SECULAR RECREATION

IT should not be necessary to read very deeply between the lines of the two previous chapters in order to understand that there is much of what Americans would call "recreational behavior" which is tightly integrated with economic and religious behavior. Stores and bakeries are foci of social interaction. Rites of passage and other rituals are occasions for parties and celebrations.

The purpose of the present chapter is to describe what might be classified as "recreation for its own sake," behavior which is certainly recreational but does not appear to be closely integrated with any of the other cultural categories which have been discussed.

THE CLUB

The "Sport Club" of Mutqil is a new institution which appears to have been started for the sole purpose of organizing the leisure activities of adolescents and young adults. If it has any other purpose, such as political activity, no hint whatever was given of it.

PLAYS

We have seen that the club's headquarters is regularly used as an everyday gathering place. It is also used for giving the annual village play in August. The village play antedates the club by many years, but the club seems to have taken over the greater part of the responsibility in putting it on. It is not clear exactly when the play was introduced into the village. Middle-aged adults seem always to have remembered it, but though traditional Arab culture has something resembling plays—actually narrative poetry recited by several individuals—the observed phenomenon in the village seems closely to be part of the recent acculturative process.

Perhaps the account of the introduction of plays into Bidoonistin early in the twentieth century gives some idea of what happened in Mutqil. Tannous says that the play was introduced into Bidoonistin through the inspiration of returned emigrants, contact with city customs, and the encouragement of mission-school teachers. After a couple of years, girls started taking part, though over the strong objections of some elders. The play soon became a village festival with guests invited from other villages, the whole community taking part in one way or another. The plays were all in Classical Arabic, the plots all taken from Western novels or plays, or derived from Arabic historical events (Tannous, 1943, pp. 141–42).

534 Presumably the development in Mengli was similar. The plays are given on the stage in the government school, which is equipped with footlights (candles with reflectors) and a painted backdrop (European forest scene). Arab theatre lore was used extensively, but *Hamlet* has been presented several times. (One young adult said he thought it was not a good play to give because the lion's share went to only one actor. It was better, he thought, to give a play in which six or seven, at least, took an equal part.) At the time of the writer's final departure from the village, the question of what play to give was being vigorously debated at all age levels. There appeared to be two opposing schools of thought, and tempers were running high in some cases.

COMPETITIVE SPORTS

536 Competitive games such as weight-lifting and javelin throwing have always been popular among the Arabs, but team athletics are something new, introduced by the American mission schools.

In Mengli, volleyball is the game, and it appears to date, like the plays, from early in the twentieth century. At present, the village has three teams, ranked in order of the collective skill of their respective players. Most of the games are "tournaments," within the village, but a regular series is played with the teams of other villages in the Qazzi. In 1951, the first team played a team from Deuxièmes, a large resort town above Beirut. The club appears to take a major role in organizing the teams and arranging games. The girls have their own team.

536 The following quotation, introduced here for comparative purposes, is taken from a chapter in Dodd (1940) which is credited to *Alif Tannous*, and probably the village mentioned in it is Bshemmin.

> A few years ago, a group of us started the game of volleyball in our village in Northern Lebanon. The game was new, and the villagers were at first lukewarm about it. However, it did not take long before the enthusiasm for the game began to touch one individual after another and lead him to request the privilege of participating. Even old farmers, who would not hear of the idea at first, began to feel proud of having their boys belong to the village team. . . . The following summer, the girls of the village caught the spirit and organized their own team. From our village the idea spread to several neighboring villages and in these volleyball teams were also organized. The next step that naturally followed was the interchange of volleyball matches among these different teams. Each week a match would be arranged for in a different village during which one hundreds of villagers would come from neighboring villages to attend the match. Volleyball became the game for the district, supplying the villagers with an excellent opportunity for recreation. (Dodd, 1940, pp. 438-39.)

DANCING

535 Although no one put it into so many words, the impression was given that such traditional dances as the *dabki* are looked upon at best with sentimental affect-